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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000288

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (Text Classification Para 8 and 9)

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ANBAR SHEIKHS ACCUSE IIP OF FRAUD, THREATEN
VIOLENCE

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Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Robert Ford for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Post-provincial election tension has arisen in Anbar province as Anbari tribal leaders have accused the (incumbent) Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) of manipulating election results with the assistance of the allegedly IIP-influenced Governorate Elections Officer (GEO). Conference of the Awakening ("Sahwa") leader Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha Bezia has threatened violence if IIP "steals" the election. PRT Anbar and senior MNF-West officers have strongly cautioned Anbar Governor Ma'amoun and Sheikh Ahmed to avoid heated rhetoric and violence. While Sheikh Ahmed and the Governor have vowed to follow the official elections complaints process, aggressive public posturing could provoke extremists within the IIP or tribal camps to escalate the situation beyond their leaders' control. To date, we have not received any reports of election-related violence. The Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) dispatched four staff to Anbar on February 4 to assess allegations of electoral violations. At this point, UNAMI believes IHEC remains on track to proceed with a February 5 preliminary announcement of results. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Election day in Anbar passed peacefully and without any major incidents, as it did all over Iraq, although initial reports suggest that turnout in Anbar was the lowest the country, at about 40 percent. However, post election vote counting has engendered inflammatory rhetoric and severe tension in the province.

13. (C) Tribal Sheikhs Ahmed Abu Risha Bezia and Hamid Al Heiss have alleged that the IIP and the GEO are attempting to steal the election by altering the vote count in areas providing key support to IIP and tribal candidates. Sheikh Ahmed accused IIP of fraud in the elections on Iraqi radio, and threatened that the Sahwa would turn from a political entity to a militant group, targeting IHEC and the IIP. Sheikh Hamid, who leads the Anbar Salvation Council party, has threatened to "burn the streets of Ramadi city" if IIP wins the elections.

14. (C) Anbar Iraqi Police imposed a curfew on the city on the evening of Sunday, February 1, after reports of celebratory post-election gunfire near the Government Center in Ramadi. No other violence has been reported.

15. (C) In response to these events, the Anbar PRT Leader and representatives from MNF-West met with Anbar Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed and Sheikh Ahmed on February 3. The PRT and MNF-West advised both to show leadership by avoiding heated rhetoric, and by telling their followers to stop any provocative acts. USG representatives noted that violence would be counter-productive, and would invite unwanted attention from the Government of Iraq (GOI). Both Ma'amoun

and Sheikh Ahmed were urged to resolve all disputes within established legal channels for protesting elections results through IHEC.

¶6. (C) Both Ma'amoun and Sheikh Ahmed agreed to follow the official elections complaints process, with Ahmed insisting he had proof of fraud and intended to pursue his case. The PRT and MNF-West will meet Sheikh Ahmed again on February 5 at a formal function at the PRT.

¶7. (U) Four IHEC officials from Baghdad, accompanied by UNAMI security officers, traveled to Ramadi on February 4 to discuss the situation with the GEO and other officials in the province.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) As expected, the well-deserved euphoria over Q8. (C) As expected, the well-deserved euphoria over the good conduct of the elections is evolving into vigorous and in some areas bitter jockeying between political parties and leaders over the anticipated results, which we expect IHEC to announce on February 5. Hard politicking is well underway. This is happening nationwide, not just in Anbar. We are not surprised by the Sheikhs reacting sharply to potential bad election news.

¶9. (C) Sheikh Ahmed's threatening utterances have certainly gotten attention in the media and at post. While he and Governor Ma'amoun have agreed (for now) to follow the established protest process, these remarks might encourage extremists in either camp to escalate tensions apart from their leaders' guidance. The Provincial Chief of Police has received no reports of elections-related violence in Ramadi or Anbar up to now. We will continue to monitor the situation. END COMMENT.

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